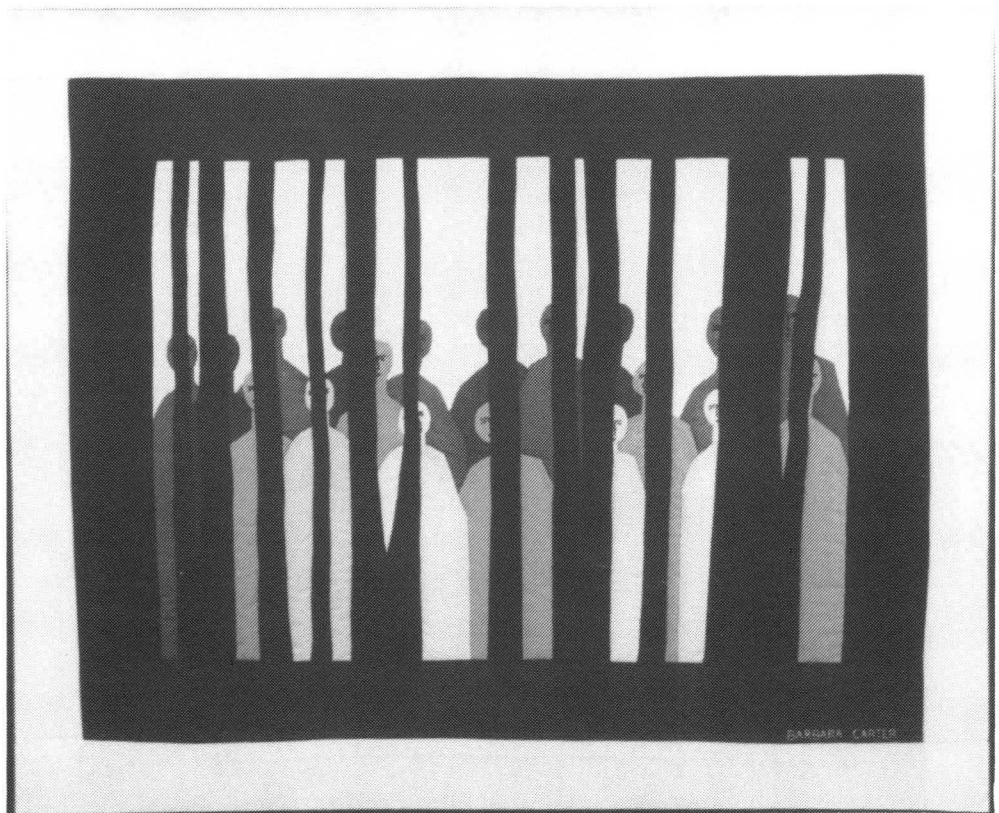


## *Book Reviews*



**A Woman's Odyssey into Africa: Tracks Across a Life.** Hanny Lightfoot-Klein. *New York: Haworth Press — Harrington Park Press, 1992, Pp. 243 paperback.*

Life is not over at fifty-one, nor even later — not even if you are a woman of seemingly fragile health or of not exactly considerable means. You can still have a research project, contribute to social change, explore a new field of knowledge, adventure into the unknown. This is what *A Woman's Odyssey into Africa* clearly proves.

This is what Hanny Lightfoot-Klein did. Starting in the 1970s, she hitchhiked several times through Europe and into Africa, more precisely Egypt, Sudan and Kenya. Having been a schoolteacher, she became an amateur ethnologist of considerable renown, who has done valuable research into female genital circumcision. In the course of her work, she lived with families of different social levels and geographical areas, and interviewed more than 400 people on all aspects of female sexual mutilation. She has published articles on the subject in such journals as *Journal of Obstetric Gynecology and Natal Nursing*, *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality*, *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, *Journal of Sex Research*, and others. Her articles were published in the United States, as well as in England, Germany and Scandinavia. Her first book, *Prisoners of Ritual*, also published by Haworth Press, contains the results of her research.

In *A Woman's Odyssey into Africa*, Lightfoot-Klein tells her own story, speaks of what happened to her during her journeys. How

does a woman past the menopause (actually past a hysterectomy, a skull fracture and several operations to one of her knees) develop into a light-footed (Hanny Klein invented the name Lightfoot for herself) backpacking individual who is afraid of nothing, not even of casual sex? How does a high school teacher become an "Africa freak"? How does a tourist become an independent researcher working on one of the most horrendous crimes perpetrated against the female body? You have to read the book.

How does a woman attain redemption from the personal abuse suffered during childhood and marriage? How, in fact, can one change one's life? How does one find freedom? Hanny Lightfoot-Klein relates her experience in the hope that others may find in it strength and inspiration.

The author has separated her personal journey from that of her sociological exploration of sexual mutilation of women. Thus we do not find many details, statistics, legal circumstances, and so on, in her present book. "The Barbaric Practice," as the British called it, is certainly being discussed and strongly condemned here, but without the factual information that would probably make it even more unbearable. I suppose that we must not forget that *A Woman's Odyssey into Africa* is meant to be an encouraging book.

I missed the presence of a map in this volume. I should have liked to follow the traveller more than with words. Photographs other than the six portraits of the author on the book cover would also have made her road more identifiable. Having been an Africa freak myself, I would have liked to visually refresh my

memories of the continent. Other readers, never in Africa, would probably have wanted to see images of the land that is being explored. It is probably for reasons of money that we have only text here, for Lightfoot-Klein mentions several times her camera and those of others. This lack of pictures is regrettable.

I also regret the absence of any self-questioning. After a difficult or even horrid childhood, with both parents abusing the child, and an unhappy marriage, the miracle of the author's rebirth, her self-assurance, her multi-orgasmic encounters with love seem almost too miraculous. As does her easily found forgiveness with regard to Germany. On her way to Hamburg, by train, she meets a young German couple and their children. The couple is tormented by guilt, especially in the presence of a Jew. However, she assures them that it was not their fault, that it had happened long before they were born, and so on. "Their eyes glowed with gratitude" and on they went and lived happily ever after, I suppose, while Hanny Lightfoot-Klein places both her hands over her heart "in a universal gesture of love." To me, this is too easy. The hitchhiking, the love-making with truckers and others, the investigation of cruel, misogynist practice: all of this seems to take on an unbecoming lightness.

And what about Ulysses? Was no female symbol available? Could no female myth be found? Just for encouragement?

Lightfoot-Klein's journeys into Africa end with a rape. After all, she will need to return home, establish herself in a safer place. She tries to deal with the violent crime by calling it, to herself, "a little, little, insignificant rape." However, she is plunging over the edge of sanity. Almost destroyed, she follows her own recipe for recovery from unhappiness and misery; she climbs a mountain and finds new

strength in adversity. A wooden goddess, bought in some marketplace, becomes her permanent companion and protector.

Obviously, having returned to North America, Hanny Lightfoot-Klein threw herself energetically into the task of communicating to others the results of her research and the memories of her private journey. Successfully so.

Marguerite Andersen  
Toronto, Ontario

**Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Theory.** Jane Gallop. *New York: Routledge, 1992, Pp. 276 paperback.*

In 1981, Elizabeth Abel asked Jane Gallop to review the feminist issue of *Critical Inquiry* that became *Writing and Sexual Difference*. For Gallop, that book was a timely encounter of feminist criticism and poststructuralism, and her review was the origin of her new book. *Around 1981* is a sustained and timely consideration of this and other encounters. As Gallop explains towards the end of the book:

In the present study, "around 1981" locates a moment when feminist criticism attains some sort of centrality. And, in the present study, that moment is centrally connected to the figure of Elaine Showalter. Showalter is, in every sense of the word, framed by the present book which describes a structure radiating from that moment. (222)

Gallop goes back to the '70s and ahead to the mid-'80s to gain strategic perspectives; as she writes in her "Afterword," "From around 1975 to around 1983, the mainstream of academic feminist criticism focused on women's writing in the Euro-American high cultural tradition [Showalter's 'gynocritics']. This book tells the story of that period, from the preparations for it up to its dismantling" (240). In an